

The Sea, Always the Sea...

Alejandro Aguilera and Radcliffe Bailey's artistic work

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Anyone who carefully looks at Alejandro Aguilera's and Radcliffe Bailey's works will surely discover more than one similarity between them. Yet, the most important one is the presence and meaning of the sea. Water, in its most ancestral sense, purifies and gives life to the Earth; it washes away sins and restores the body to its original splendor. In Radcliffe's images, the sea is an expanse that holds the history of the African diaspora, a history that takes the spectator not to an earlier time but to another space—a space of origin and freedom. And, to better express this, he uses the presence of a solitary sailing vessel in his works.

On the other hand, in Alejandro's works, the sea has a terrifying beauty, perhaps comparable only to the importance it has in ancient mythologies, in the Bible, and in tales of drowning people. At times, his paintings represent vistas from the ocean depths, and at others they render bird views. If in the first instance the spectator appears to have drowned, in the second he or she is the only surviving witness to a shipwreck. Something

similar happens with his sculpture of the patroness of suicide, *Attraction*, whose base is a wooden rectangle filled with water and whose semblance bears the very traces of the ocean's currents. Her beauty reminds us of the "beautiful merciless ladies" praised by the Romantic poets. *Attraction* toward beauty and death.

The fact that both artists give to the very same symbol such diverse meanings attests to their creativity and contrasting views in art. In addition, it evidences the benefits of a collaboration between artists who, despite their very different ideas, are equally able to imprint passion and talent onto their work, such as the photographs in this essay clearly prove.





Alejandro Aguilera, *Narcissus*, 2005
Photo: Reis Birdwhistell



Alejandro Aguilera, *A Brief History of Usage*, 2007. Detail, installation at Bernice Steinbaum Gallery



Alejandro Aguilera, *Black Drawings (Noguchi-Lee Krasner)*, 2004
Photo: Reis Birdwhistell



Alejandro Aguilera, *Travel Landscape*, 2001-2004
Photo: Reis Birdwhistell



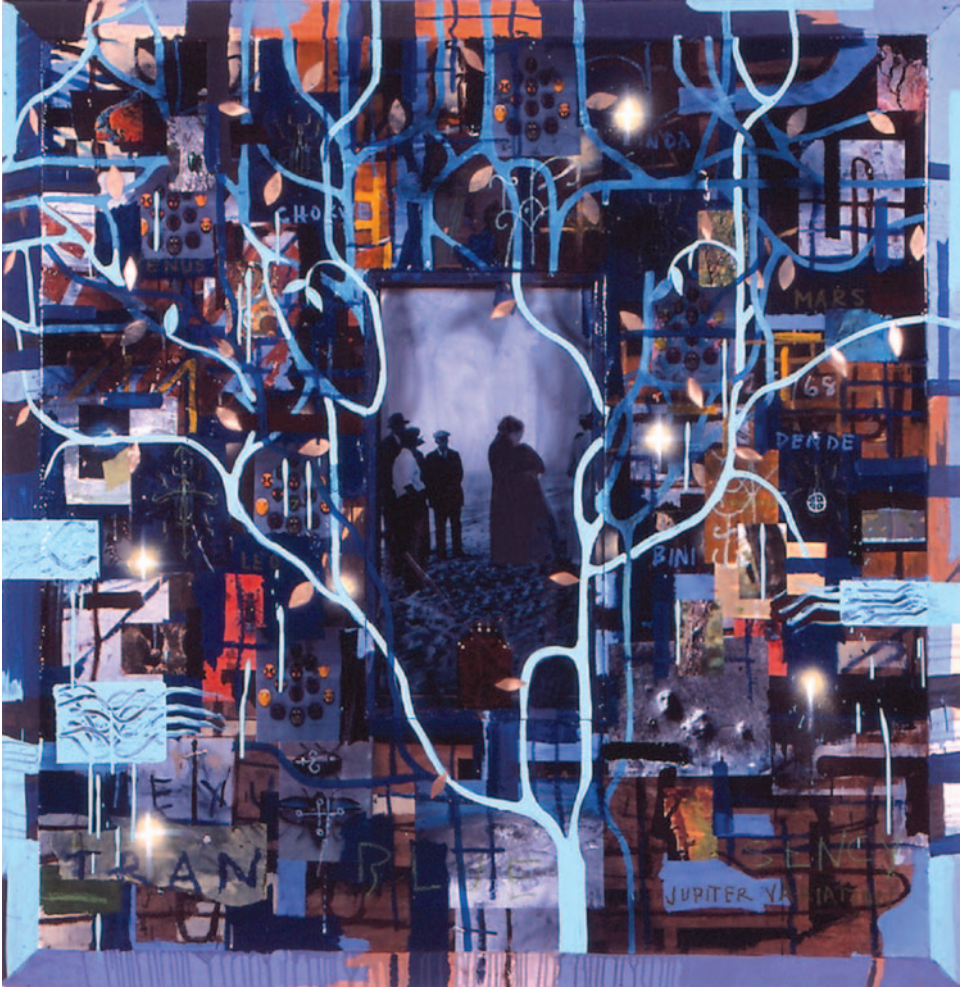
Radcliffe Bailey, *Untitled*, 2005
High Museum Collection Atlanta



Radcliffe Bailey, *Storm at Sea*, 2006. Detail, installation at Jack Shainman Gallery
Photo: Karen Tauches



Radcliffe Bailey, *Untitled*, 2005
Photo: Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery



Radcliffe Bailey, *Transbluesency*, 1999